



**Disciples**  
*Making Disciples*

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## Of Sign and Salvation

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent  
22 Dec 2019

Is 7:10-14  
Rom 1:1-7  
Mt 1:18-24

As we approach Christmas, our readings always turn to Mary, for it is through her that our God enters the world. When Isaiah prophesies in our First Reading that the Lord will send a sign – “the maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel” – it is thus immediately apparent to us that Isaiah is foretelling the virgin birth of our savior.

But this was hardly clear at that time.

Back in 733BC, according to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, King Ahaz of Judah was facing a threat of invasion. Damascus (Syria) and Ephraim (northern Israel) had formed a coalition against the Assyrian empire, and were compelling Ahaz to join them.

A shrewd strategist, Ahaz maintained his view that the coalition had no chance against the northern superpower. Accordingly, he planned to enter into a protection treaty with Assyria, which guaranteed him security and saved his country from destruction. There was one catch: Judah would have to worship Assyria's gods.

Amidst this historical context, Isaiah invites Ahaz to trust in the power of

God, rather than the power of kings. Isaiah goes so far as to invite Ahaz to request a sign from God. So when Ahaz refuses, it is less an expression of faith in God than it is in *realpolitik*.

What did Isaiah's prophecy mean then at that time? How could a maiden and a child deliver Judah from its imminent crisis? How did Ahaz understand this?

Pope Emeritus concludes that he did not. God's solution is so radical that it seems illogical, inconceivable, incomprehensible. Perhaps the sign remained a mystery, even to Isaiah himself.

“Exegesis has therefore searched meticulously, using all the resources of historical scholarship, for a contemporary interpretation — and it has failed,” he writes. “There is nothing in its own historical context to correspond to it.” (p.49)

Fast forward 700 years to the conception and birth of Christ. Israel's prevailing expectations of salvation has not changed. They were still political in nature: freedom and independence, material prosperity, the reestablishment of the Davidic kingdom.

It is thus critical that Joseph is a direct descendant of David, for it is through David's line that Israel will be delivered. And since Joseph is the legal father of Jesus, Jesus belongs to the house of David.

But Jesus is also “conceived by the Holy Spirit”. Only God is truly his Father.

In Jesus, the messianic expectation is thus elevated and made new. David established his place in world history by building a kingdom in this

*“The promise of forgiveness of sins seems both too little and too much: too much, because it trespasses upon God's exclusive sphere; too little, because there seems to be no thought of Israel's concrete suffering or its true need for salvation.”*

- Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI  
*Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*

world; Jesus is the culmination of salvation history and his kingdom is decidedly not of this world.

In this Sunday's gospel, the angel of the Lord foreshadows this when he tells Joseph that Jesus “is the one who is to save his people from their sins.” (Mt 1:21)

And yet, the deliverance that Israel yearned for was from suffering, not sin.

Pope Emeritus thus observes that the promise of forgiveness of sins “seems both too little and too much: too much, because it trespasses upon God's exclusive sphere; too little because there seems to be no thought of Israel's concrete suffering or its true need for salvation.” (p.43)

As we prepare for the birthday of our Lord, let us remind ourselves then that Christmas is less a season of worldly festivities than it is a time of otherworldly joy. However weighed down or caught up in the world we are, we can rejoice, for Emmanuel is born. God is with us and he will deliver us from our sins.

## Announcements

For announcements in the bulletin, send your requests to [mmm@sfxchurch.sg](mailto:mmm@sfxchurch.sg) by the MONDAY before the weekend, 2359hrs

### PARISH OFFICE CLOSURE

Please note that the Parish Office will be closed as follows:

**Tue 24, 31 Dec - Open till 12 noon**  
**Wed 25 Dec, 1 Jan - Closed**

### SFX FUNDRAISING UPDATE

SFX has raised a total of cash & pledges amounting to **\$2,035,808.30** as of **Dec 2019**. The priests and Fundraising Committee appreciate everyone's efforts and thank all parishioners for their contributions in funds and participation in fundraising activities. **We look forward to the continued support as we work towards our \$2.3 million fundraising goal.**

### ADVENT PRAYER TREES

What better gift for Christmas than the gift of prayer? Let the Holy Spirit guide you in praying intentionally for someone this Advent - either to return to the Sacraments, or to be open to knowing our Lord and receiving the Greatest Gift of JESUS this season! **Write their name(s) on a tag and hang it on the prayer trees near the sanctuary in Church.** As a faith community, we will pray for all these intentions throughout Advent.

### MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER: MAKE YOUR MARRIAGE A PRIORITY!

Good marriages can always be made better. To deepen and refine your couple relationship, sign up for one of the coming Marriage Encounter Weekends.

**Dates:** 3-5 Jan; 6-8 Mar; 20-22 Mar (Mandarin) & 1-3 May

**Register:** [mewkend@gmail.com](mailto:mewkend@gmail.com) or contact 9670 5390 (David/Clara)

### HAPPY BIRTHDAY, FR JUDE (22 DEC)!

22 December is special as not only do we celebrate the 4th Sunday of Advent, we also celebrate the birthday of our very own Fr Jude! As we are reminded this Sunday of God's love for us, we bear witness to this message from having received the love shown by Fr Jude for our parish and her community. We wish Fr Jude a blessed birthday! May God's grace continue to flow abundantly in your life and ministry!



### NO ACCESS TO COLUMBARIUM

**As we have not obtained the Temporary Occupation Permit, our columbarium remains closed until end January 2020.** For safety reasons, nobody should enter the columbarium and the construction site, unless authorised. The Church will not be responsible for injuries sustained arising from unauthorised entry. We seek your cooperation and thank you for your understanding and patience.



#### CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE

**Christmas Vigil**  
(Tue, 24 Dec)

**Pageant** 5pm

**Family Christmas Eve Mass** 5.30pm

**Carolling** 8.30pm

**Christmas Eve Mass** 9pm

**Carolling** 11.30pm

**Midnight Mass** 12mn

*There will be light refreshments and fellowship outside the Kindergarten after Mass, all are warmly welcome!*



**Christmas Day**  
(Wed, 25 Dec)

9am, 11am, 5.30pm

#### NEW YEAR'S MASS SCHEDULE

**New Year's Eve**  
(Tue, 31 Dec)

6.30am, 6.30pm, 10.30pm

**Countdown to 2020** - 10pm

*Join us for a time of reflection and thanksgiving for 2019 as a parish community in the Main Church. This will be followed by the Countdown Mass where we can give thanks to God for the past year, and where we can offer to God the new year ahead. There will be light refreshments and fellowship outside the Kindergarten after Mass, all are warmly welcome!*

**New Year's Day**  
(Wed, 1 Jan)

8.30am only



### LANDINGS: WELCOMING RETURNING CATHOLICS

Landings presents **Returned!**, a testimony event. If you or someone you know who is exploring a reconnection with the Catholic faith, we welcome you to come and see.

#### What to expect:

- Testimonies by Landings participants
- Sharing about how Landings work
- Conversations over refreshments

**Date:** Fri 10 Jan 2020

**Time:** 7.30pm - 9.30pm (registration from 7pm)

**Venue:** CANA (55 Waterloo Street #03-01, S187954)

**Register at:** [bit.ly/2QdcyFY](https://bit.ly/2QdcyFY) or scan the QR Code

SCAN ME



The Landings programme at Church of the Holy Spirit will commence on **Mon 10 Feb 2020**. We invite Catholics seeking a reconnection with the Faith and those interested in this ministry to participate in this 10-week programme. Interested participants will need to register. **Registration closes on 27 Jan 2020**. Please email [returning@landings.org.sg](mailto:returning@landings.org.sg) or find out more at [www.landings.org.sg](http://www.landings.org.sg).

## *Pope Francis: Nativity scenes show a 'domestic Gospel'*



Putting up a Nativity scene before Christmas is a reminder to stop and remember what Christmas is really about and to prepare one's heart like a manger for the coming of Christ, Pope Francis said.

At his weekly general audience Dec 18, the last audience before Christmas, Francis dedicated his catechesis to the Nativity scene and to Jesus' birth. Picking up themes from his new apostolic letter on the meaning and importance of Nativity scenes, Francis told the crowd that the creche is "like a living Gospel" and should be set up in "the places where we live," including home, school, workplaces, hospitals, prisons and public squares.

In the midst of daily life, he said, the Nativity scene is a reminder "that God did not remain invisible in heaven, but came to earth, that he was made man, a baby. God always has been close to his people, but when he was incarnated and born, he became very close, super close, the closest."

A Nativity scene, he said, "celebrates the closeness of God."

Francis said he likes how most Nativity scenes portray the baby Jesus with his arms open "to tell us that God came to embrace our humanity," which helps people discover "the nearness of God. It is to rediscover that God is real, that God is concrete, that God is alive and vibrant. He's not a far-off lord or detached judge, but he is humble love that came down to us."

In the crazy days before Christmas, when there seems to be so much to do and so much noise, Francis encouraged people to pause for a moment of silence in front of a Nativity scene "and confide to the Lord what's going on in your life. Talk to him about the people and situations closest to your heart. With him, take stock of the year that is ending, sharing your hopes and worries."

Nativity scenes can portray all sorts of activities and events of daily life and family life, too, he said. "Yesterday I was given a card of a special Nativity scene, a little one, that was called 'We'll Let Mom Sleep.' And there was Mary



sleeping and Joseph with the baby Jesus, trying to get him to sleep. How many of you husbands and wives have had to take turns in the night to care for the baby who was crying and crying and crying? Letting Mom rest – it's the tenderness of a family, of a marriage."

In the simplicity and poverty of the manger, he said, "the Nativity scene is an artisanal image of peace," a reminder needed in a world where "every day many weapons are manufactured, and many violent images are put before our eyes and hearts."

"While the ruin of humanity is everyone taking their own path, in the Nativity scene everyone moves toward Jesus, the prince of peace," the pope said. "Around him, in that grotto lit by tenderness, harmony is rediscovered. There we find very different people gathered together – Magi and shepherds, kings and the poor, little ones and the elderly."

Addressing Arab-speakers at the end of the audience, he said: "The manger Jesus longs for is your heart so that he can give you his unshakable peace and eternal life. This is what will change the world."

And the pope told everyone, "I hope you will set up a Nativity scene at home because it is an occasion to invite Jesus into your life.

"Putting up a Nativity scene is like opening the door and saying, 'Come in, Jesus,'" he said. "This invitation we make to Jesus to enter our lives makes his closeness concrete. Because if Jesus lives in us, we are reborn. And if we are reborn, it truly is Christmas."



# Fourth Week of Advent: Love



In the Gospel Reading today, the angel describes Jesus as the saviour who 'saves his people from their sins', declaring him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us". Indeed, as we complete our preparation this Advent season, we are reminded of God's abundant and overflowing love.

As we receive God's love, we are also called to share it with those in our midst. By our merciful presence, kind words and loving actions, we become Christ for others. We extend the presence of God-who-is-with-us to others, and marvellously, we can also meet Christ anew through others. God our Father's promise of salvation lies in the Christ in us drawing all together as the whole body, to dwell in right relationship.

As we approach Christmas, let us be reminded of what God has done for us and of His love. Also, we reflect on the people around us, that we meet in our lives, perhaps they, too, need a reminder of God's love this season. Through our prayers and action, may we share God's love with others.

*(Some parts extracted from the Office of the New Evangelisation's Advent Reflection booklet [www.one.org.sg/resources](http://www.one.org.sg/resources))*

## Mass Timings

### WEEKEND MASSES

**Sat Sunset:**  
5.30pm (Novena at 4.45pm)  
**Sun:** 7am, 9am, 11am & 5.30pm  
*Confession 15 mins before Sunday Mass*

### WEEKDAY MASSES

**Mon - Fri:**  
6.30am & 6.30pm  
**Sat:** 6.30am

### MASS ON PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

8.30am *only*

### HOLY HOUR

8.30pm, every first Thurs of the month except PH

## Opening Hours

### PARISH OFFICE

**Mon - Fri:**  
9am - 9pm  
**Sat:** 9am - 7pm  
**Sun:** 8am - 1pm

### ADORATION ROOM

Temporarily closed

### LIBRARY

Temporarily closed

### COLUMBARIUM

Temporarily closed

### CANTEEN

Temporarily closed

## ANOINTING OF THE SICK



The sacrament can be administered to any Catholic awaiting serious surgery, suffering from serious illness or weakened by old age. Anointing may be given before admission for the anticipated medical procedure. Contact the Parish Office to request for a priest. In emergencies, priests of the church nearest to the hospital can be contacted.

## INFANT BAPTISM



Baptism of Infants is held every 2nd Sunday of the odd month at 4pm in the main church. Preparation session for both parents and godparents is held the Sunday before at 3.30pm in the SFX room. For more information please check with the Parish Office.

## FUNERAL



Please check with the Parish Office for priest availability and Mass timing before confirming the timing at the crematorium. For prayers at the wake, please contact the Parish Office.

## MARRIAGE

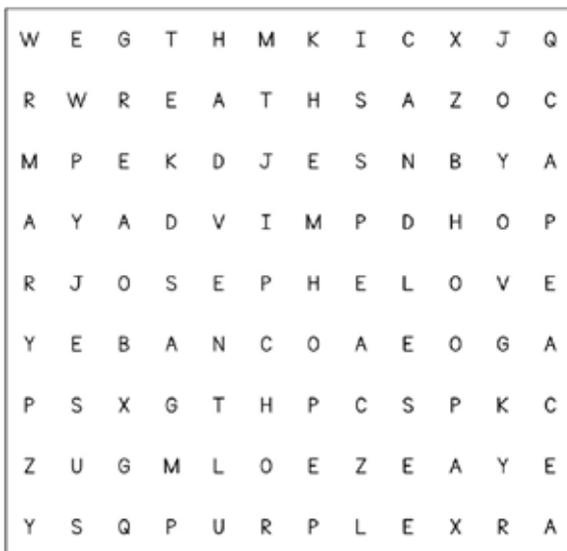


Contact the Parish Office 12 months before your intended date to book the church premises and ensure that your presiding priest is able to make that date. Church unavailable from 1 Nov 2018 due to renovations.

## MASS OFFERING



Mass offering envelopes are available outside the Parish Office and Church. Submit your envelopes at least two weeks in advance of your intended date. Please write the names clearly, and in block letters.



## Advent Word Search

Words can be found left to right and up and down.

- Advent
- Wreath
- Candles
- Purple
- Hope
- Peace
- Joy
- Love
- Mary
- Joseph
- Jesus



## VOLUNTEER & SHARE YOUR GIFTS!

If you're interested in content curation and design layout, contact [mmm@sfxchurch.sg](mailto:mmm@sfxchurch.sg)